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THE HISTORY OF THE CHE-CHE-PUY-EW-TIS.

A LEGEND OF THE NORTHERN CREES.

THE Northern Crees have extended themselves from the northwest territories of the Dominion eastward around the head of James Bay, up the east main coast of Hudson Bay, and far into the Labrador peninsula, also southward towards the watershed of the St. Lawrence, a few of them having been met with on the Bell River, just north of the Ottawa. Their language is almost identical with that spoken by the tribe in the northwest territories, and but little of it is understood by their neighbors, the Ojibwés or Algonkins, to the south. Of course they have carried some of their legends with them, and the story of Che-che-puy-ew-tis is told more or less imperfectly, and with variations, both west and east of Hudson Bay.

The following is the most complete single account of the hero which I have obtained. It was compiled, at my request, by Mr. C. H. M. Gordon, at Rupert's House, near the southeastern extremity of James Bay, from several versions of the narrative, taken down in shorthand, as told by different Indians living in that part of the country, and I give it mostly in his own words.

The spelling of the name is according to the Eastmain dialect, in which che or chi often takes the place of ke or ki, so that elsewhere it might be Ke-che-puy-ew-tis, and the meaning is "the little one (or very little one) that is alive" (or moves or quivers), in allusion to its having shown signs of life when the mother's womb containing it was found immediately after her murder, and the name thus adopted may have been the exclamation of the discoverer at the moment. A name given under these circumstances would be in keeping with one of the oldest and commonest customs of the tribe in calling a child after something said, heard, done, or seen at the time of its birth.

One legend says the hero was suckled and reared by a mouse, but this may have been the name of a woman, for among these people female children are often named after small animals. This is ren-

dered more probable by the story itself, which farther on tells of her wigwam, etc. In other Cree legends we have accounts of fox-women, bear-women, etc.

Beaver hunting is one of the chief occupations and means of living among these Indians. They attribute the sagacity and industry of the beaver, and the means of self-protection which he adopts, to the teaching of Che-che-puy-ew-tis, and when they are baffled in their attempts to capture him they do not consider their failure as due to any want of skill or hard work on their own part, but to the intervention of this hero. The purport of the legend is to explain how he became the ruler and chief adviser of the beaver tribe.

A certain analogy will be noticed between this legend and that of Romulus and Remus. Among the points of resemblance are: the two brothers, the suckling and rearing by an animal, the killing of a very near relative (brother in the one case, father in the other) by the brother who distinguishes himself, and the analogy of their achievements. The one legend says that Romulus, who built Rome, killed his brother Remus; the other that Che-che-puy-ew-tis, who built strong (beaver) houses, killed his father. In both cases the tribe which was benefited by the hero became strong and numerous. The Cree legend has perhaps as ancient an origin as the other. Among the Ojibwé and Cree legends which I have collected may be recognized also parallels to the siege of Troy, Potiphar's wife, the creation of the world in (twice) six days, the making and naming of the animals, the deluge, the stopping of the setting of the sun, Goliath the giant, Jonah and the great fish, and the final burning up of the world.

The above legend runs as follows:—

Once upon a time there lived an Indian, his wife, and their only son. The period had nearly arrived for the woman to be delivered of her second child. The husband had a presentiment that something was going to happen to his wife, for he repeatedly warned her when he went off hunting to take care of herself, and that if any sign of danger arose she was to hide their son under the brush flooring of the wigwam.

One day, while the man was away from the wigwam hunting, a Toosh, or devil, came, and finding only the woman in the tent, cruelly killed and disembowelled her, throwing aside the womb containing the unborn child. The Indian returned from his hunt and found the mutilated corpse of his wife, but he was in time to catch the Toosh, which he put to an ignominious death. His son he found alive, as his wife had taken the precaution to hide him under the brush of the wigwam floor, as she had been told. For a number of days the man remained in his tent, mourning the death of his wife.

It happened that just after the womb had been thrown aside, an A-pook-a-shish (mouse) chanced to hunt in that direction, and saw what she thought to be food, but on nibbling at it she was surprised to find it quivering, and on further examination she saw what proved to be a living child. Being of a kind disposition, she took it home and nursed it tenderly, and called it Che-che-puy-ew-tis (the little one that moves or quivers). The Indian and his son now moved their wigwam (which is an universal custom among these people when a death has occurred).

When the son had almost arrived at manhood he became a keen hunter, but was very unfortunate in losing his arrows. So frequently did this happen that at last he told his father of it. "Come now," said the old man, "shoot an arrow a short distance from where we stand, and we cannot fail to see what will become of it." The boy did as he was told, and was surprised to see an A-pook-a-shish run away with it. "This is how my arrows are lost," he said. "I will follow and see where she takes them." He did so, and came to the wigwam of the A-pook-a-shish. On entering he saw all the arrows he had lost, but they were in possession of a young boy, who was amusing himself with them. The A-pook-a-shish now told the young man that this child was his brother, and related exactly the manner in which she had saved him, but cautioned him not to tell his father when he returned, as the old man might not be pleased. The lad did as the A-pook-a-shish told him, and after that he often went and visited his brother. Occasionally, when they thought the father was absent, they returned home together.

The father at last noticed that there were footprints of two sizes about the tent, and questioned his son regarding them. But the boy, still wishing to keep secret the identity of his brother, gave a misleading answer. The A-pook-a-shish having heard about it, said it would be much better for them to go to the wigwam together, for sooner or later their father would be certain to find them out. So Che-che-puy-ew-tis took his little brother home to their father's wigwam.

When the Indian returned in the evening with his hunt, he noticed the boy in the tent, and asked his son who the little stranger was, and where he had found him. The lad told him it was his young brother, and related how the A-pook-a-shish had discovered him after the murder of his mother, and gave him full particulars, which satisfied the man that this was really his child. He pretended to be very glad, and told his sons to go at once to the A-pook-a-shish's wigwam with the meat of a whole beaver, and thank her for having rescued his son. But all the time he was meditating on a scheme to get rid of both the boys, as he intended taking a second

wife. Still, for some time after this they all lived together in harmony with one another.

Whilst the father was off hunting, the sons always used to remain about the wigwam, but they noticed that he always went to hunt in one direction, and wondered why he did this. So they made up their minds to follow his path when an opportunity should occur, and find out the reason for his strange behavior.

The next day the old man did not go hunting as usual, so the boys took advantage of this chance to investigate, and they followed up his tracks until they stopped at the margin of a deep lake, and further pursuit seemed impossible. But Che-che-puy-ew-tis was equal to the occasion. He said to his brother: "Pull up some strong spruce-roots ["watap"] fasten them around my waist, then take hold of the other end and I will go under the water. When you feel the roots shake, be sure and pull me out again." Che-che-puy-ew-tis then went into the water and found, as he expected, a large wigwam in the bottom of the lake. At the door were two Pishews (lynxes). He took hold of both of them, shook the roots, and his brother pulled him to the surface again. They killed the Pishews, and returning presented them to their father; but the old man, instead of being pleased, wept bitterly, and told his sons that hereafter it would be better for them to live separate; so going out of the tent, he left them together.

Che-che-puy-ew-tis, knowing their father was angry, said to his brother: "Our father will certainly come again in the morning, so let us make a number of arrows and be prepared. They did so, and, as the elder brother said, their father appeared in the morning, in company with a number of Pishews, who began to attack the boys; but the arrows they had made the night before played havoc among the Pishews, so that not one of them escaped. The following morning the attack was repeated with a fresh lot of Pishews, but Che-che-puy-ew-tis this time, after the animals were all slaughtered, shot an arrow at his father and slew him also.

The two boys now lived together and were very happy, hunting in company and killing all kinds of game.

Years had passed when one night Che-che-puy-ew-tis was awakened by his brother talking to some person, as he thought, and wondered who it could be. In the morning, when his brother went out, Che-che-puy-ew-tis looked into his robe, but found only some rotten wood. He threw it out of the wigwam, saying, "Why do you soil my brother's robe?" The next night he again heard his brother in conversation with some unknown person, and in the morning, on looking into his robe, found this time an Atik (frog), which he threw outside with the same exclamation.

Then Che-che-puy-ew-tis said to himself, "I will find wives for my brother," and he did find them, bringing home two young squaws, whom he presented to him. Thus they lived for some time, the younger brother having two wives and the elder not even one. At length one of the wives became discontented and said to the other: "I will remove to the left side of the wigwam, where our brother-in-law sits. He has no mate, and besides I find it inconvenient for both of us to be staying with one man." The other wife consented, and the next time the young men returned they found only the oldest of the wives sitting in her usual place on the right side of the wigwam, the youngest having gone over to the left side, where Che-che-puy-ew-tis generally sat.

When the men laid down their day's hunt at the door, as is customary, the youngest of the women pulled Che-che-puy-ew-tis's share to the side she had taken possession of, which clearly showed that she wanted this hunter for herself. But Che-che-puy-ew-tis did not agree with the arrangement which had been made by the women, and he also knew that his brother would be displeased with it. Besides, he wanted a wife of his own choosing. He therefore left the tent secretly.

After Che-che-puy-ew-tis had walked a considerable distance, he met with an Atik (deer). They conversed together for some time, and then he told her to find a suitable spot on which to erect a wigwam whilst he went hunting for some food for their supper. He returned in the evening and stayed with Atik one night, but would not remain another, as he thought Atik's legs were too long. So he departed in the morning.

He next met a Muskwa (black bear), but only remained with her one night as he had done with the Atik, her claws being too long and sharp to suit him.

Then he fell in with Kak (porcupine), but again one night was sufficient for him to remain with her. She could not look him straight in the face, her neck being too short and her sharp quills were also very disagreeable. So he left her, as he had done the others, and went on his journey, still determined to find a suitable mate.

The next creature Che-che-puy-ew-tis fell in with was a Wes-ku-chan ("whiskey-jack," the Canada jay). They made a wigwam for the night, as usual, and Che-che-puy-ew-tis provided a beaver for their supper, leaving it, Indian fashion, at the door. But it proved too heavy for poor Wes-ku-chan to manage, and she broke both her legs in trying to haul the carcass into the tent. Che-che-puy-ew-tis was equal to the occasion, and, taking the string off his bow, he bound the legs up nicely and the little bones soon grew together

again, but to this day the marks of the bowstring can be seen on the legs of all Wes-ku-chan's descendants. Che-che-puy-ew-tis did not remain more than one night with her, she being altogether too inquisitive. So he proceeded on his way again.

All at once an Amisk (beaver) met him, and without waiting to be asked she said to him: "If you want a mate, I will go and live with you." She appeared more to his taste than the others, so he answered: "Yes, but you must not be lazy. You will always require to work hard; and one thing which I shall insist upon is, that whenever we come upon a creek you must lay brush or sticks for me to walk upon. If you fail once in doing this, the creek will turn into a river and we will be lost to each other." So the Amisk agreed to the terms and they lived happily together. One day, unfortunately, Amisk (who was supposed to know a creek when she came to one) made a mistake. She was not certain that what she saw was a creek or not, and did not lay sticks or brush for her husband as usual.

Che-che-puy-ew-tis, when he returned to his mate in the evening, was horrified to find that the water at which he had left her had now turned into a large river. He only now found out that Amisk had made a mistake, and he bewailed the loss of his mate for a long time.

Walking one day along the bank of this large river, he saw to his surprise his wife swimming and diving about in the water, evidently enjoying herself. Che-che-puy-ew-tis called out: "Come ashore; you must not leave me." But Amisk said: "I cannot live ashore any longer; I find this water more to my liking; you had better come to me instead; see how easy it is to swim and dive. Throw me one of your mittens and I will show you that the water is not even wet." This she said in order to entice Che-che-puy-ew-tis to go to her. He threw one of his mittens to her as she had requested, and Amisk, diving down, brought it to the surface quite dry, having secretly anointed it with her oil. She threw it to Che-che-puy-ew-tis, saying: "Have I not told you that the water will not even wet you, just as it does not wet your mitten?" Che-che-puy-ew-tis was now convinced, so he jumped into the water and was astonished to find that he was quite at home therein, and he stayed with his mate and lived as the beavers live.

Towards the autumn they started to build a house, but Che-che-puy-ew-tis was not at all satisfied with the way Amisk set about it, which was after the manner of the old-time beavers. He knew that, if they did not make it better than that, the Indian hunters would surely be able to kill them, as they had killed so many beavers already, if they should find their house. So he showed Amisk how to fasten

the large sticks, knit together the smaller ones, and mix them with stones, and how to plaster it with mud which would freeze solid, till at length they had made quite a secure abode. They lived happily together there for a time, but after a while something happened which broke the harmony, and one day Che-che-puy-ew-tis said to Amisk : "As I left my brother's wigwam without his knowledge, and as I know he has a great regard for me, I am certain, it being now winter, that he will look everywhere till he finds me, and if he discovers us here he will be sure to kill you. Come, let us make holes along the bank, so that, should the house be broken into, you will be able to escape."

Several months had passed, and the elder brother (Mejigwis) was very much annoyed at Che-che-puy-ew-tis for having left him without giving any warning, and was displeased with his youngest wife, who had been the cause of his departure. Whilst hunting this winter it had seemed to him that the character of the Westa (beaver houses) had changed,—that the Amisks had constructed them differently from those of former years. In consequence of this he now found it difficult enough to keep his family in beaver meat. At last it dawned upon him that there must be some one wiser than the Amisks themselves guiding and directing them, and who could this person be but his brother Che-che-puy-ew-tis. He therefore redoubled his efforts to find him, and, acting on the idea he had formed, he directed his attention to the beaver-houses. One day, while out hunting, a larger Westa than he had been accustomed to see attracted his attention, and cautiously approaching he broke into it and was rewarded by finding his long-lost brother; but the Amisk escaped to the holes they had made in the bank.

Che-che-puy-ew-tis was brought back to his brother's wigwam, and the best of everything was given to him, but one thing he stipulated was, that when any of the party brought home a Pay-uko Amisk (a solitary beaver), he was to be sure and mention it, as he was afraid that some day his brother might kill his mate, and he did not wish to eat her, as he knew that something would happen to himself if he did so.

His brother obeyed his wish as long as there were plenty of Amisks to kill, but frequently he was able to bring home only barely sufficient meat to feed the party, and one day he came back to the wigwam with only one beaver, and it was a Pay-uko Amisk. But he did not let Che-che-puy-ew-tis know about it, as they did not like to see him take no part in the meal. So they cooked the Amisk, and first offered Che-che-puy-ew-tis some of the liquid it had been boiled in; but he refused it, saying he feared that, as his brother had killed only one, it might be a Pay-uko Amisk. "Oh, no," said his brother;

“there were quite a number of Amisks along with this one, only all the rest escaped.” So Che-che-puy-ew-tis, believing his brother, drank of the liquor and ate of the flesh ; but immediately after he had done so, he was transformed into a real Amisk, and jumping into the creek, on the bank of which the wigwam stood, he dived under the water and was lost forever to his brother. But he still lives as a Kitche-kisai-misk (a great old beaver), and it is his wisdom to this day that prevents the Indians from entirely exterminating the Amisk tribe, of which he is the great chief and counsellor.

Robert Bell.

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